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Academic Session 19: RCA 2014

AAH2014

40th Anniversary Conference & Bookfair

Royal College of Art, London

10 - 12 April 2014

Material Translations

Session Convenors:

Christine Guth Royal College of Art

Marta Ajmar Victoria and Albert Museum

Richard Checketts University of Leeds

As global history studies develop, it has become increasingly important to understand not only the processes through which goods are exchanged, but also the way in which meaning is communicated through the substances from which they are made. Many translational dynamics are engaged as materials travel temporally and spatially from one culture – from one shared system of signs, meanings, and beliefs – to another. Their ontological status may change; they may be physically transformed; different technologies may be used to work them, in turn producing new products. All these negotiations may themselves condition the language and experience through which materials become both known and unknown.

This panel invites papers that explore the ‘translational’ capacity of materials as agents of cross-cultural communication both in line and in tension with the artifacts made from them. What kinds of wider cultural issues – or constructions of the boundaries between ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ – are engaged in the process of translation? Does material translation tell a story of convergence or divergence? Is the ontological status of the material unstable? Are the transactional qualities of objects silenced or activated in the process of movement? Does material translation reveal local craft or technological relationships that are otherwise invisible? How do the differing circumstances of their encounter impinge on their interpretation? What kinds of emotional or sensuous implications might be revealed in the processes of translation?

Papers:

Victor Buchli (University College London) *Material Shifts*

Luisa E Mengoni (Victoria and Albert Museum) *From Fields to Market Stalls: Material Translations of Ceramic Shards*

Maria Alessandra Chessa (Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert Museum) *The Transformative Nature of Paper: From Substance to Meanings*

Michelle H. Wang (University of California, Berkeley) *Woven Translations: Characters in Textiles from the Eastern Han Dynasty*

Yeseung Lee (Royal College of Art) *The Skin, the Garment Surface, and the Production of Modern Magic [practice-based presentation]*

Owen Johnson (Royal College of Art) *The Practical Act of Translation: Interpreting a Moresque Stucco Pattern through the Glass Technique of Murrini [practice-based presentation]*

Emily Candela (Royal College of Art and the Science Museum) *Building Viruses: A Material Dialogue between Crystallography and Architecture*

Jana Scholze (Victoria and Albert Museum) *Ghosts Dancing*

Fiona Allen (University of Leeds) *Concrete, Aluminium and the Politics of the ‘Untranslatable’*

Ashley Thompson (University of Leeds) *On the Portrait of an Exemplary Material Witness to Khmer Rouge Crimes*

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